**ND Cares Coalition Meeting Minutes**

**December 7, 2023**

Co-Chair Cindy Whitesell opened the meeting. There were 20 people in attendance.

Dean Dauphinais of Native Solutions talked about his efforts within the Native veteran community to remove the barriers for veterans to use more services and benefits. As an example, he recently helped coordinate a Tribal Veterans Standdown in Spirit Lake where all tribes were invited, and their transportation and lodging were paid for. They are also considering several stand downs such as one for each tribe. Dean hopes to build bridges between the native community and local organizations offering services and resources. He is open to collaborating with anyone in the ND Cares Coalition.

**Coalition Member Updates**

Amy Ruff, resilience risk reduction and suicide prevention coordinator from the North Dakota National Guard talked about the four new integrated primary prevention positions who are focused on reducing, preventing sexual assault, harassment, suicide and self-harm.

Joyal Meyer for the Dept of Health and Human Services reported that ND currently had 124 suicides for the year and 21 of those were military related (17%). These are provisional numbers that may change as more cases are examined.

Pam Sagness from Behavioral Health Division talked about the Human Service Centers becoming community behavioral health clinic or an CBHC. Some of their services will be specifically for veterans. They have also just implemented a contract with telehealth company to ensure that jails in North Dakota all have access to tele-behavioral health services and will onboard all jails across the state over the next two years. They are also expanding their mobile crisis services by contracting with a company that provides tele-mental health services in law enforcement vehicles. This will begin in southwest region of the state. They also received funding to contract with Williston CHI to develop a 10 bed inpatient facility for behavioral health and another in Dickinson.

Pam Mack from Protection and Advocacy stated that they continue to do the State’s disability rights work and hey do a great deal of Protective Services work in collaboration with vulnerable adult Protective Services and CPS staff and will continue to support veterans with disabilities and their family members.

Paula Heitman from the VBA stated they plan to increase outreach to veterans who've experienced military sexual trauma doing at least 12 hours per quarter in 2024. If there are groups would like more information, please contact Paula.

Kora Docktor of the ND Suicide Prevention Coalition reported that the turnout for their recent conference was good and she thanked all who contributed. One of their new initiatives is to start sending out cards to families when they hear about suicide death. It will start with a personal note and followed by a letter with resources. Kora is asking for two things: they we notify her if we learn of a suicide in order to help her reach their family members and she’s looking for someone to help write personal notes on the letters. Kora is also collecting stories from those who have suffered a loss. Lastly, she talked about the Hope Café which is a virtual get-together for survivors. The first one is December 12th.

Summer Hanson from the VA talked about their Military to VA program. They outreached on the phone to about 960 new Post 911 veterans over the last fiscal year. And of those, about 835 schedule were scheduled with primary care for the first time. They also received 35 military treatment facility transfers and currently have about 65 veterans on ongoing case management. Summer is also starting a mindfulness-based stress reduction meditation training.

Jonathan Ross from NDSU talked about work on the Governor’s Challenge statistics dashboard.

Dr. Weintraub from the Fargo VA stated that the VA has a temporary COMPACT Act coordinator, Katie Gallegher who is also a social worker. They but they are looking for someone longer term. Access sprints, an initiative from the Under Secretary for Health will increase capacity and offer earlier appointments to veterans. This has started in primary care and specialty medicine and mental health is in the works and will be going live in the next couple of weeks. This is for new intakes, new veteran evaluations. Lastly, the Fisher House is still in the real estate acquisition phase.

BG Jackie Huber of the National Guard reported that their number one priority right now is recruiting and retention. Currently there are about 120 people on the southwest border who have been there since October. On Feb 4 there will be a welcome home for the first of the 112th Aviation Battalion. The NDNG Foundation is continuing to work with the state Historical Society on the State Military Museum project.

Danae Groves from Grand Fork AFB talked about the Community Integrated Primary prevention plan or CIP to prevent interpersonal or self-violence and addressing some morale problems and perceptions of unfair treatment. Deployments have increased so they are addressing increased mental health issues for service members and their families.

Kelli Weiand and Nikki Frohlich from Military Outreach talked about her work to help plan the Together With Veterans Suicide Prevention Summit in Minot and the annual North Central Veterans Standdown also in Minot. Nikki talked about the upcoming event at the Veterans Home in Lisbon where the Army Guard and Air Guard will jointly bring gifts and offer camaraderie to veterans.

Todd Remington from the Bismarck Vet Center reported that Vet Centers can now offer some bereavement services to the family members of any veteran or active duty or guard member that dies via suicide.

**Administrative Report**

Michelle Panos talked about the number of ND Cares Communities and Businesses and the presentation at the Minot Lodge Senior Living Center. Current ads that are running on TV and radio include two for the Veterans Home, SGT Nathan Griffin TV ad, a radio ad for the PACT and COMPACT Acts, and she showed a draft TV ad for the COMPACT Act. The current strategic plan mostly includes Governor Challenge initiatives. She introduced the Statistics Dashboard on the ND Cares website and where to find a summary of the initiatives. We are still working on training healthcare providers and getting the provider toolkit out to healthcare systems. The VA Suicide Prevention office spoke at the ND Hospital Association Conference about the COMPACT Act. Partners continue to distribute cable gun locks at various events. There will be more CALM training opportunities coming up and the University of Jamestown will administer the CEUs for up to 250 participant a year. She also talked about the two efforts concerning peer support, one to recruit actual veterans and the to train existing civilian peer support specialists about military culture. There was also discussion about the suicide tracking graphs on the dashboard. The Hidden Wounds Bridge dedication working group was formed and developments include moving the event into the spring of 2024, adding 988 prevention signs along with the bridge signs. Michelle reviewed the budget and stated that ND Cares continues to be very frugal. There was one new donation from the Bob Woodward Foundation.

**Events**

There were no questions about the events listed on the agenda. BG Huber stated that the Wreaths Across America event at the Veterans Cemetery in Mandan on the 16th will start at 11:00 AM.

**Next Meetings**

The next Coalition meeting will be on March 7th, and the next Executive Committee meeting is January 4th.